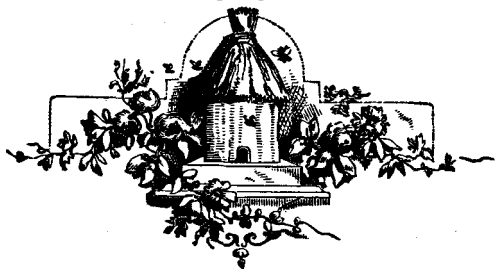


a community called ...

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THE UNLOCKED DOOR.

THE keen winter of 1858 will not soon be forgotten by the inhabitants of the village of B——, situated on the south bank of the Nidd, a Yorkshire river, whose rapid and brawling waters were caught at last by the frost, and their music hushed and their motion stilled.

Hastening to school one morning after the frost, our little friend, W. B., made for the door with a bound. His mother, as if foreboding what would happen, strictly charged him that he should go straight to school, and, whatever

he did, mind to be sure to keep off the river, for as yet no one had ventured upon it.

Two hours of school passed away, and, as the night drew on, William's mother began to inquire if any of the neighbors had seen "Our William." No one had; and she walked hastily to the house of the nearest school-fellow.

"Have you seen aught of our William?" she said with a voice that betokened alarm.

"Never since mornin' school was over," was the reply.

"Why, what do you mean?" said the mother, whose terrified looks now betokened considerable alarm, "wasn't he at school this afternoon?"

"O no. Teacher asked for him, but no one knew why he was absent, and we thought you had kept him at home for something or other."

It was enough. The poor creature's whitened lips told her fears, and quickly the news flew that little "Bish" was missing, and it was thought that he must have gone on the ice

of the river. In a few moments the neighbors were astir. Hither and thither, patiently and anxiously, every accustomed haunt and every unlikely spot was searched far and near. Some flew to the river's brink, but there was no trace of broken ice. To be sure, there was a weak spot newly frozen over under a tree not far from the bank; but then that had probably been made by a blow from a stone thrown on to try the strength of the ice the day before. Well, night wore on, and although darkness set in, yet all the night through unwearied search was made by the aid of lanterns carried by anxious and willing friends. The succeeding day dawned and closed, but still no tidings of "our lost one." Every spot for miles round likely to have offered rest to a weary little wanderer was searched. Bills were printed, rewards offered, and inquiries made far and near, but still no tidings. The mother rocked and moaned in her chair, ever and anon starting up to take a hasty look to see if some welcome messenger were bringing the long-lost one back. For upward of seven long weeks

the parents and neighbors hoped and despaired, watched and wept.

At last a heavy storm of wind and rain swelled the floods of Nidd; and when the water had subsided another search was made, and this time not in vain. Caught by his little tunic, there hung our poor little "Bish" from the bough of a tree, swollen and besodden. They took him gently down; they wrapped him carefully up, and brought him home. Yes, the poor little and long-lost one was at last rescued from the rude grasp of the unfriendly element, and laid by his mournful parents upon that little bed where in life he had slept so securely.

The writer of this record had frequently visited the parents in their sorrow, and he no sooner heard of the child being found than he seized the first opportunity of offering any services he could. The father was at his work, but the mother was at home with a calm gleam of satisfaction settled on her face, which seemed to say, "I know the worst, but I have him safe."

"Well, neighbor," said the visitor, the clergyman, "sad as the news is, you must be greatly relieved by knowing for certain what has become of your long-lost treasure?"

"Ay, I am that!" she answered. "We locked our door last night and went to bed as if we could rest."

"Locked your door!" said the minister; "don't you always lock your door?"

"We always used to lock it," she said; "but since William was lost, we have not done so till now; for," added she with feeling and pathos which the writer will never forget, "I thought if it should happen that my bairn was only lost and should find his way home, he should never find his mother's door locked against him."

As I walked home I thought on those words, "he would not find his mother's door closed against him." What a story is this of a mother's love—of a love which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things. She would leave the door on latch to the very last. Others might give up hope; she would

cling on to the last shred. Till she saw her boy dead before her, she could not but think that he might return.

O the loving-kindness of a mother! O the long suffering! O the hoping against hope! But what are these but shadows of a great reality—sparks from the central Sun of all love? What is all a mother's love in comparison to that of God? Yea, she may forget, but he will not forget. We speak of the loving kindness and the long-suffering of God to sinners. Alas that we use it too much as a phrase of speech! We hardly believe ourselves when we use the word.

Yes, so it is. The Father's home on high is ever "on latch" to the returning and repentant prodigal. By night and by day, in sickness and in health, in the sunshine of prosperity and under the dark cloud of trouble, he is always waiting to be gracious, and ready to receive us back. Not yet, blessed be God! not yet is the door shut. By and by, when the Bridegroom has gone in to meet the bride, the door will be shut. It will be then too

late to call and knock. To those who would enter then his words will be, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I know you not." "When once the master of the house has risen up, and hath shut to the door," it will be vain to knock; but till that hour it is always on latch for the returning sinner.

But let none presume on the long-suffering of God; rather let us, as St. Peter tells us, account it to be salvation. Christ has died that we should not die. It is the cross of Christ which has unbarred the gate of heaven, but it is the finger of faith which must lift the latch. But we must come now ere the door is shut, and come in faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God." We have but to lift the latch and we are safe, and yet in that little act of faith how much is implied. Men do not lift the latch who trust to be saved without Christ. Men do not lift it who trust to their penances for the past or good performances for the future. But those who have no trust in themselves learn to put trust in Christ—those who find the door barred to

their deserts try the latch of faith. They find God's plan of salvation as simple as it is sublime. Led by the Holy Ghost, they enter in and are saved ; and find Christ, who is the door, to be also to them the bread of life and the water of life.

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